**TIPS FOR WRITING SECRETARIAT BRIEFING NOTES**

**Writing**

1. Make the purpose, recommendation or focus of the discussion immediately clear up-front. Doing this will allow members to read the balance of the information with the purpose in mind. Focusing your audience will also elicit the type of feedback that you want from the consultation.
2. Write with your readers in mind. Orient the information to your reader and use language they can understand. Keep it concise and focused, making sure that you have a clear narrative flow.
3. Use technical jargon and acronyms only as needed (spell out acronyms and bold and bracket the abbreviation at the first use). Acronyms should only be used if the word or phrase is stated more than twice in the document.
4. Process-driven writing (outlining the steps taken to get to this point), if included, should be very concise when addressing the Board of Governors. A more detailed outline may be appropriate for the General Faculties Council in some instances.

**Content**

1. No more than three pages, preferably one to two. The most valuable briefing notes are clear, concise, reliable (accurate and complete for its purpose) and readable.
2. Make sure that you understand the issue and what you really want from this body before writing the brief. Include all of the information that you believe the reader requires to make an informed decision. Put yourself in the reader’s place and ask if you would be comfortable making this decision based upon the information provided.
3. If you have one solution or course of action, persuade your audience. Describe it and explain why it is the ideal path to take and what other options were considered and why they were discarded. Think strategically about what you are trying to accomplish and have data and facts to support your position.
4. If it is a new or difficult problem, you might not have one effective solution in mind. Think of several possibilities and present each as an option. If available, provide comparative data about effective implementation of the options in other situations.
5. Outline the material risks and consequences. Doing, or not doing, the action may have a cost and consequences, both financial and otherwise. Explain these costs, being specific and including all necessary facts to convey that you have thoroughly contemplated the issues. Explain the material risks of doing or not doing the action and how you plan to mitigate the risks of doing the action.
6. If the issue involves complicated processes, break them down to the most relevant aspects. Use tables and charts where possible to convey detailed and complicated information.

**Editing**

1. Once you have completed the brief, re-read it with the following questions in mind:

* Is the motion worded to accomplish what I am trying to do? (Does it ask for the right things? Is it concise, clear and focused? Does it cover everything I need to have the body do to accomplish my purpose?)
* Is the requested action clear?
* What is the bottom line? Have you positioned the key pieces right up front?
* Have you spoken from your reader’s perspective? (Put yourself in the shoes of the reader and ask if you would be comfortable making the decision based upon the information in the brief. Are you convinced? Does it raise questions for you and, having anticipated the question, can you answer it in the brief?)
* Have you drafted strategically?
* Is the information accurate and complete for its purpose?
* Does it include unnecessary information? Is the level of detail appropriate?
* Does it flow logically?
* Is the writing readable?
* Is the layout easy to view?
* Would you be comfortable using the briefing note as a script in the meeting?
* Are there errors that will jar the reader and cause them to lose focus on the narrative?
* Are all of the supporting materials appropriate, available and ready to go?

1. Have someone not familiar with the issue read the brief. This will tease out any problems that you have not spotted because of your familiarity with, or knowledge of, the issue.